# Report of the Project "Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary" Fifth Season, 18.1.-16.3.2014 (fieldactivity)

(funded by the German Research Foundation, Germany, and the Qatar Sudan Archaeological Project)

### Angelika Lohwasser

University of Muenster, Germany

## 1. Staff

Lohwasser, Prof. Dr. Angelika, Archaeologist, Project Director Karberg, Tim, M.A., Archaeologist, Field Director Eigner, Dr. Dieter, Architect Eger, Jana M.A., Archaeologist, Remote Sensing, Coordination QSAP-project Helmbold-Doyè, Dr. Jana, Pottery specialist Mohammed el Toum, (NCAM) Lange, Rayk, Mechanics Aufderhaar, Wienke, Student of Archaeology Beckmann, Carina, Student of Archaeology Dörbandt, Anne, Student of Archaeology Petereit, Julia, Student of Archaeology Schlüter, Sarah, Student of Archaeology

# 2. Proposed work

After finishing the intensive foot survey in the lower Wadi Abu Dom, we planned to proceed with a more reflected survey, noting only more relevant sites like graves and hut structures or rock art and neolithic sites. Additionally to traditional survey methods originally planned, a different and innovative approach should be implemented into the survey activities: The investigation of the middle Wadi Abu Dom by low altitude aerial remote sensing using a camera-equipped quadrocopter driven by on-board GPS and a DGPS ground component. In the end, we were not able to conduct this part of the project because of administrative difficulties to import the microdrone.

Beside continuing the survey we planned to make the architectural documentation of the ruin in the Khor Shingawi. This ruin lies at N 18°33'35", E 32°08'32' and is within the concession of Henryk Paner, but he agreed to my application to document this building through our architect Dr. Dieter Eigner, who is experienced in the ruins of the Bayuda.

## 3. Realized work

## A-Survey (Fig. 1)

The survey took place in the middle Wadi Abu Dom, starting from N 18°23'47" E 32°04'20" and reaching N 18°14'53" E 32°12'26". It was prepared already by intensive study of satellite images, including the inclusion of the visible data into our database, therefore we could head for several sites directly to evaluate these data. This year our intensive survey covered 24 km of the Wadi Abu Dom. At both banks we investigated the region depending on the topography up to 4 km into the hinterland.

During this campaign, a total of 1222 sites were documented, containing altogether 2079 features. Complete lists of the features recorded and the finds collected are attached.

## General results:

We observed a significant reduction of sites behind the bend of the Wadi Abu Dom at Umm Beida. Even bearing in mind that we did not include the category "concentration of stones" (manmade, but date and function unknown) any longer, there are much less sites in the northern part of the middle Wadi Abu Dom surveyed so far. There are differences in the distribution of the sites according to the topographical situation: in the hilly ground north of the Wadi the sites are (relatively) plentiful, in the region behind the ridges in the plains nerved with dykes there are only few sites. On the southern bank there are wide plains, again with only few sites.

Last year we realized a difference in the type of wells (in the lower Wadi Abu Dom the wells consist of a large cylinder-shaped pit, mounted with stones, and a small deep hole; in the middle Wadi Abu Dom the wells are only holes in the ground). This coincides with the difference in the economic structure: horticulture in the small oases in the lower Wadi Abu Dom, pastoral subsistence in the middle Wadi Abu Dom. Maybe the difference in the distribution of the categories of our sites reflects also these differences in antiquity.

The bed of at least some of the side khors seems to be quite young, since we observed the destruction of some tumuli by a channel of water. In one case a khor divides a Postmeroitic cemetery into two parts, again some of the tumuli heavily disturbed by the water. Maybe this is also the reason for the absence of older campsites, which are usually situated at the terraces of side khors.

## Cemeteries

Although the number of cemeteries decreases, the size of the cemeteries, the number of tombs and the dimension of tombs increase. There are less and less box graves after the bend of the Wadi Abu Dom. Nearly all documented box graves of this year are laying within Postmeroitic cemeteries. On the other hand, we found Christian pottery (even of good quality) sometimes as surface find on several spots.

We documented only few so-called Kerma-tumuli, situated at the ridges (Fig. 2). At none of these we found associated pottery. Within the areas of rocky dykes, several cleft burials are situated (Fig.

3). They have different sizes and irregular shape, since they lean against boulders. Most of them are disturbed and we found sherds of pottery nearby. At a plateau in the hinterland we found two big dome graves, both of them disturbed.

Postmeroitic cemeteries were the most prominent feature in the otherwise quite meager archaeological region (Fig. 4). They are situated at the terraces near the wadi and at side khors. The graves itself are spread over a considerable area and the cemeteries include different types of superstructures. We hope that with future excavations we can detect the evolution of the types. Small numbers of box graves are also incorporated in these cemeteries (Fig. 5). The box graves are clustered in rows together at one spot, but sometimes even built on the Postmeroitic superstructures. The types of superstructures vary from very flat tumuli, surrounded with a band of quartz nuggets (Fig. 6) to quite huge tumuli (diameter up to 15 m and 1,5 m high) with a mounting of big black slabs (Fig. 7). Some of the tumuli seem to have a "nose" (triangular widening) to the east, some have a visible elevation of the superstructure at one side.

#### Settlement structures

There are some clusters of round huts visible on the surface, most of them at the pass between two rigdes or at plateaus in the hinterland. Several of these ridges contained cleft burials. The hut structures are usually quite simple (3-6 stonerings of 2-3m diameter, clustered together), only in few cases they seem to be more elaborated (Fig. 8 and 9). Since there were not found sherds we cannot suggest any date. We plan to excavate one of the hut structures within the next campaign to gain more information.

We observed only few (in comparison to the lower Wadi Abu Dom) campsites at the terraces at side khors, most of them were quite recent. But the lack of older campsites can be the result of the variation of the water channels of the side khors (see above).

#### Other sites

Like in the region of el Tuweina, where we worked last year, also in the area surveyed this year we recognized several "gravel beds" (Fig. 10). Some of them are associated with stonerings. In many cases there were more than one of these gravel beds, sometimes situated at 90° to each other (Fig. 11). These gravel beds are often associated with Postmeroitic or Christian pottery. We did not excavate one of them yet, but the parallels already dug by Henryk Paner at the Forth Cataract and the difference in orientation of the single features let us suggest that these were also no graves. We plan to excavate some gravel beds exemplarily next season.

Besides the" gravel beds" we found another type of platform, more or less regularly paved with slabs. Again, we cannot explain the function or date.

Stonerings were abundant, but since they are mostly without finds one cannot define the date or function. They are situated in plains as well as at slopes of hills. Their size is 2-3m and they are constructed either of one single ring of stones or a rim of several stones.

There are some very small stonerings within the rocky areas, which we address as deposit so far.

Near some of them we found some pottery.

There was nearly no rock art in the area surveyed this year. This observation continues the trend we had already last year that with the advance deeper into the Wadi the rock art decreases.

### B-Architectural documentation of the ruin in Khor Shingawi (Fig. 12 and 13)

About 15 km east from the Nile valley between Nuri and Merowe Dam, near the track leading into the Northern Bayuda, lies the ruin of an antique building in the wide plane of Wadi Shingawi. Geographical coordinates are N 18°33'35", E 32°08'32".

Today, the site is situated more or less within the khor itself, with channels with some grass surrounding the building. One can suggest that it was not so in antiquity. Some small formations of rocks and single boulders are nearby; high mountains are in the background.

It is a stone building of dry stone masonry, built of rough gneiss blocks. Measurements of plan were about 13 m by 43 m, remains of walls rise up to a maximum height of about 2 m above the flat surface of the Wadi. But due to accumulations of wind-blown sand, only about 50 cm to 80 cm of stone masonry are visible, also rooms are filled with the wind-blown sand. The building appears to have no particular name given by the local population; some consider it to be a grave.

The mission of the W.A.D.I.-project spent about one week at the site, accomplishing an exact documentation of the visible architectural remains and conducting one sounding (Sond. B) in the courtyard and re-examining the sounding (Sond. A) done by the Polish expedition of G.A.M.E. in 2012, which was still open. Both soundings revealed that the building stands on a surface of hard compacted fluvial sediments, a kind of "gezira". Further result of the soundings was the proof of the existence of a coat of mud-plastering on the surface walls, which is completely eroded away on the visible parts of the masonry. In sounding B the existence of a hard compact mud/turab floor of the courtyard was ascertained. It rests on a layer of building construction debris. Furthermore a clearing of surface sand and stone debris was effected in some places, in order to gain more information on the architecture.

All these intrusions, including the recent robber's pit, were refilled and the former surface was restored.

The walls are built of dry stone masonry, the joins and hollow spaces are filled with pieces of stone partly mixed with clay, but not with mortar (in the same way like the structures in the Wadi Abu Dom). The used dry stones are flat pieces of gneiss. The quality of the construction is not very high (Fig. 14).

The structure is oriented east-west with one L-shaped entrance at the north-eastern corner. The plan of the building clearly shows two sections (cf. Fig. 13). The western part, built of 1.00 m to 1.10 m thick walls, shows 5 rooms (17-21) of elongated plan, and one small room (22), which is inaccessible. The central room 8, 3.35m wide, was seemingly not roofed, as in the profiles of

sounding A no debris of any type of roofing could be observed. In the eastern wall of room 17 are two comparatively large windows (about 40 cm wide), overlooking the courtyard. More of these windows can be tentatively suggested for rooms 19, 20, 21, according to some features in the masonry of walls. The western building can be entered through one doorway only, from the courtyard. The function of the western building still remains unclear until further excavations. The eastern part of the building could be entered through a doorway (1.10m wide) on its northeastern corner (Fig. 15). It is the only doorway of access for the whole complex. It leads to corridor 1, which offers access to three apartment-like suites of rooms (2-3-4 and 5-6-7-8 and 9-10). Walls are here 60 cm to 80 cm thick. For "apartment" 2-3-4 some small windows (about 15 cm wide, 23 cm high) could be ascertained. In room 10, which fell victim to robbers at an earlier time, an abundance of mud-brick debris and mud soil can be observed, which obviously came to light through robber's activities (Fig. 16). In the other rooms in the vicinity there is just few debris of mud-brick visible. Bricks are about 20 cm wide, other measurements cannot be obtained. It remains an open question if the rooms were covered by mud-brick vaults, or if the stone walls were just extended in height by mud-brick and roofing was flat (wood-mats-mud-construction). Along the outer walls of the building there is comparatively little stone debris, although a good part could still be covered by the wind-blown sand.

Room 11 is an extension of corridor 1 and offers a wide opening of access to the courtyard. Areas 14 and 16 can be interpreted as ramps leading up to the top of rooms 3 and 15, which are otherwise inaccessible. They could be silos or just the substructures of platforms. Room 12 is inaccessible - silo?

The manner of construction and the character of rooms show a clear resemblance to the buildings of Umm Ruweim 1 and of Quweib. These could be dated to the Late Meroitic - Early Postmeroitic period. Nevertheless inspector Mohammed el Toum found in the near vicinity of the ruin a sherd of stamp-impressed Meroitic ware on the surface of the Wadi (Fig. 17).

A first tentative interpretation of the building of Wadi Shingawi could be one as a seat of a local ruler.

Today the main track from the asphalt through the Bayuda leads only several hundred meters north of the structure. During our work, every day 4-5 cars passed and the people asked if we dig for gold. We always explained not to do so, but there is the danger that there will be unauthorized digging there. There was already a big hole dug into the crossing of three walls in room 19 (Fig. 18).

#### C- Pottery study

Since our pottery specialist could not attend the last two seasons, Jana Helmbold-Doyè had to deal with the finds of three seasons together. Being for 4 weeks with us this year, she documented 2627 sherds, doing statistical recording and register them into the database. All the sherds of the campaigns 2009-2014 are washed and photographed, several sherds are already drawn (Fig. 19-20).

To achieve the full documentation of all sherds, we need to export 135 samples, mostly with decoration, which are too time consuming to be drawn in the field season.

The pottery covers the periods from Neolithic up to the Islamic time. The majority of the material is datable into the Postmeroitic period and we can observe close parallels to the pottery found this year in Zuma (see 5. Trips). On the other hand we found pottery of only local distribution which has no parallels in the Nile valley up to now. Moreover there are sherds of non-local origin, visible in specific components of the fabric.

#### **D-** Conservation works

Since the W.A.D.I.-project is in this stage only a survey project, we have no large scale conservation within our plans. But we realized that there are more and more tourists visiting even remote sites like Umm Ruweim, therefore we prepared the erection of a barrier between the track and the forecourt of the building (Fig. 21). The ghafir Mablul will be responsible for the construction of a blockade of wooden beams. In the second step next year, we will erect an information sign at the entrance of the structure to guide the tourists there and to provide them for stepping over the crumbly walls.

Through the QSAP-funding we are engaged in the conservation project at Ghazali, where the plaster on the walls was cleaned and stabilized.

#### E- Trips

We did a two-days tour to visit the sites of El Kurru, Zuma, Banganarti, Kerma and Dokki Gel. Besides the introduction of these important sites to our students we had the opportunity to speak with the excavators Geoff Emberling, Rachael Dann, Mahmoud el Tayeb and Bogdan Zurawski to learn about their recent explorations. Especially at Zuma and Banganarti we had the possibility to compare the pottery of these sites with the ones we find in the Wadi Abu Dom. We want to thank our colleagues for their readiness to discuss their thoughts with us.

On March 13th and 14th, the German ambassador Rolf Welberts and the Director General for Culture and Communication of the Federal Foreign Office, Germany, Dr. Hans-Ulrich Seidt, accompanied by his wife Maritta Seidt, visited the sites at Jebel Barkal, El Kurru, Nuri, Ghazali and Umm Ruweim. They were guided by Angelika Lohwasser and showed great interest in the antiquities of the Sudan. The Federal Foreign Office, Germany, funded the architectural documentation of Umm Ruweim in 2011 and El Tuweina in 2013.

#### 4. Proposal for future activities

Our plans for the next year consist of two parts: on one hand we will continue the survey (it is proposed for two more years) with good preparation in remote sensing. In this part of the project (funded by the German Research Foundation, if the application for prolongation is positive) we will also include sondages at hut structures, gravel beds and campsites. The project part funded by QSAP will deal mainly with the excavation of Postmeroitic tumuli to develop knowledge of the

material culture and burial customs in this remote area. The link between both parts of the project will be the preparation of survey and excavation with remote sensing high resolution photographs.

# 5. Endangered sites

Several of the tumuli we found in the Wadi Abu Dom were already disturbed, some of them quite recently (Fig. 22). Since we met repeatedly gold seeker in the Wadi last year, we assume that these people were responsible for the robber's work. Fortunately we did not meet any goldseeker in the Wadi this year, although there were some in Khor Shingawi. We hope that the rest of the tumuli are safe for the moment. We thought about installing a ghafir, but since there are only very few people living there, all of them lacking a car and the cemeteries are far from each other, it would not be possible for one person to guard them.

# 6. Final remarks

We would like to thank Mr. Mohammed el Toum very much for all his indispensable help and smooth organization! He has acted as a good mediator to the people in the Wadi Abu Dom as well as an expert for organization and especially as a good friend to us!

Karima, 20.3.2014

Angelika Lohwasser

# "Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary", 5th Season, Figures



Fig. 1: Sites discovered in 2009-2013 (blue) and 2014 (violet)



Fig. 2: Tumulus on ridge

Fig. 3: Cleft burial



Fig. 4: Postmeroitic cemetery



Fig. 5: Box graves within a Postmeroitic cemetery



Fig. 6: Flat Postmeroitic tumulus



Fig. 7 High Postmeroitic tumulus



Fig. 8: Hut structure



Fig. 9: Hut structure



Fig. 10: Oval "gravel bed"



Fig. 11: Two rectangular "gravel beds"



Fig. 12: Building in the Wadi Shingawi



Fig. 13: Sketch plan of the building in Wadi Shingawi



Fig. 14: Drystone masonry

Fig. 15: Entrance a the northeastern corner



Fig. 16: Mudbrick in room 10



Fig. 17: Meroitic sherd near the building of Wadi Shingawi

Fig. 18: Recent Robber's pit



Fig. 19: Postmeroitic pottery



Fig. 20: Drawing of surface finds



Fig. 21: Proposed protection of Umm Ruweim



Fig. 22: Recently disturbed tumulus